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Troop pact set, 1967 cables say

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A NEW YORK — A CIA official complained to agency director Richard Helms in 1967 that Gen. William C. Westmoreland apparently had skewed Vietnam intelligence reports to avoid media criticism, but several days later struck an agreement with the general, according to documents introduced in court yesterday.

A series of internal cables and a memo used as evidence in Westmoreland's libel suit against CBS detailed a battle between military and CIA analysts over estimates of enemy troop strength in the Vietnam War.

A The cables — sent by George A. Carver Jr., the top CIA official for Vietnam — detailed his view of a heated conference in Saigon over the politically sensitive intelligence reports.

At the start of the conference, Carver cabled Helms with the complaint that his mission was "frustratingly unproductive" because of "stonewalling" by members of Westmoreland's staff who were "obviously under orders."

Carver wrote that the "juggling of figures" by Westmoreland's staff and "tacit or oblique lunchtime and corridor admissions" by his officers "all point to the inescapable conclusion that Gen. Westmoreland ... has given instruction to direct order" that the estimate of Vietcong strength would not exceed 300,000.

He said the rationale appeared to be that an increased estimate of enemy strength would lead to an "unacceptable level of criticism from the press."

Westmoreland is suing CBS over a 1982 documentary, *The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception*, that said the general imposed an artificial ceiling of 300,000 on enemy strength estimates to give the impression the war was winnable.

He contends CBS libelously accused him of deceiving President Lyndon B. Johnson about the progress of the war.

Carver's five internal CIA cables and a memo show that a marked change took place during the September 1967 conference, in which Westmoreland's officers opposed the CIA's plan to number civilian "self-defense" troops in an official national intelligence report.

The day after complaining of "stonewalling," he said the talks had been "full of action and behind the scenes scurrying" in Westmoreland's command, but so far "little movement."

The following day, Carver met with Westmoreland and had dinner with Robert Komer, a representative of the President with the rank of ambassador.

He was then able to report in a cable to Helms, "Circle now squared, chiefly as result of Westmoreland session (and perhaps Komer dinner). We now have agreed to a set of figures Westmoreland endorses. Mission seems on verge of successful conclusion."

The CBS documentary contended that the CIA gave in to Westmoreland's demand not to count civilian enemy troops.

The general's attorneys have portrayed him as a man who willingly accepted a CIA offer to mention the civilian forces in the narrative of an intelligence report, but not to count them.

Westmoreland attorneys Don M. Burt also introduced as evidence a memo Carver wrote to Ellsworth A. Bunker, U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam, that said an agreement had been reached over troop estimates. The memo praised Westmoreland and his staff for "invaluable contributions."